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ABSTRACT

Father presence, as a paradigm, is a rich and complex construction of father roles, family functioning, and fathers' relations to children's development driven by functional, psychological, and affective aspects of parenting extending beyond physical and fiscal boundaries. This review critiques extensively the voluminous father-absence literature and presents related paradigms. Diversity issues, specifically ethnicity, which are often excluded in typical reviews of father absence, are integrated throughout the review. The thesis of this review is that the father-absence research is constrained by its simplistic and narrow perspective on parenting influences as well as its adherence to a stagnant cultural ideal (M. Lamb, 1987) that weakens purported linkages to child outcomes. Although few empirical studies make the linkage between child outcomes and a more multifaceted notion of father presence, they are powerful and compelling works. The review asserts that within the context of caring and nurturing relations, fathers can offer unique contributions to the development of healthy children in a variety of family types. (Contains 133 references.) (Author/KB)

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Father Presence Matters: A Review of the Literature

LR-FP-96-02
January 1996
(Second Printing)

by

Deborah J. Johnson
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Commissioned by the

National Center on
Fathers and Families

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Abstract

Father presence, as a paradigm, is a rich and complex construction of father roles, family functioning, and fathers' relations to children's development driven by functional, psychological, and affective aspects of parenting extending beyond physical and fiscal boundaries. The voluminous father-absence literature is extensively critiqued prior to the presentation of related paradigms. Diversity issues, specifically ethnicity, which are often excluded in typical reviews of father absence, are integrated throughout the chapter. The thesis of this review is that the father-absence research is constrained by its simplistic and narrow perspective on parenting influences as well as its adherence to a stagnant cultural ideal (Lamb, 1987) that weakens purported linkages to child outcomes. Although few empirical studies make the linkage between child outcomes and a more multifaceted notion of father presence, they are powerful and compelling works. Within the context of caring and nurturing relations, fathers can offer unique contributions to the development of healthy children in a variety of family types.

The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) is a policy research center that is practice-focused and practice-derived. Based at the University of Pennsylvania, NCOFF's mission is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families by facilitating the effective involvement of fathers in caring for, supporting, and advocating on behalf of their children. Efforts are organized around three interdependent approaches: program development, a policy research and policymakers engagement component, and dissemination activities. NCOFF's research plan is developed around seven "Core Learnings," distilled from the experiences of programs and agencies serving fathers, mothers, and children around the country.

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Father Presence Matters: A Review of the Literature

Toward an Ecological Framework of Fathering and Child Outcomes

by Deborah J. Johnson

This review explores father presence from various vantage points, incorporating literatures on father absence, single parenting, marital disruption/discord, divorce, and father care. In an ecological framework each literature contributes to a further contextualization of father presence. Family relations, father parenting roles, and child outcomes can be assessed broadly from these empirical perspectives. The father-absence literature predominates in this area of father-child relations and arrives at the conclusion that nonresidence of fathers has a negative effect on child development. This negative effect has been examined in terms of intellectual, psychosocial, and psychosexual development of children in relation to family structure and functioning. Of critical importance to the development of this literature base has been its reliance on samples of low income children and children of color. Often class and culture were confounded in the early evolution of this topic. As this introduction indicates, this review of the literature will not take the more traditional approach of focusing upon a narrow well defined set of studies on father-absence nor will it emphasize methodological issues. Rather, this review triangulates several related literatures in order to capitalize upon evidence the scientific community has to offer to the concept of father presence and its effects in children's lives.

Father presence extends beyond physical and fiscal boundaries to practical and emotional relations with children (Ishii-Kuntz, 1992; Marino & McCowan, 1976). Fathers who parent may be residents or nonresidents of their children's households. Father presence is a rich and complex construction of fathers' roles and relations to children. The concept of father absence is sorely limited by its emphasis on the residential location and personal contact patterns of biological fathers. Furthermore, the paradigm seems to be established upon a cultural ideal of masculinity prevalent in the historical period prior to the 1970s (Lamb, 1987). As such, father presence is more than the mere antithesis of father absence. Unfortunately, very little research focuses on the broader concept of father presence. Nevertheless, these few studies are compelling.

The emergence and proliferation of father-absence literature is linked to demographic changes in the United States, perhaps initiated during War World II (Cherlin, 1981), but more intensively felt and recognized in the last 30-35 years. Given especially low divorce rates during the 1950's, in the 1960s America grew alarmed at its increasing divorce rate, the surge in childhood delinquency and urban violence, and the economic downturn of child well-being in urban centers (Moynihan, 1965). Research on father absence proliferated in the 1970s (Bee, 1974) and 1980s (Mott, 1994). Some of the first major longitudinal studies of divorce were also launched during this period (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978; Wallerstein, 1987). During the late 1980s and 1990s, much of this literature evolved into a broader, more inclusive paradigm of father-specific parenting roles, relations, and involvement (e.g., Belsky, 1984; Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992; Lamb, 1996a; McAdoo, 1988) in contrast to the mere discussion of father locale or division of labor among husbands and wives. The remainder of the research on children in households with nonresidential fathers merged into this more global perspective, refocused itself into the burgeoning literature on single mother and mother-only households (e.g., Dickerson, 1995; McLanahan & Booth, 1989; McLoyd, 1990; Sandefur & McLanahan, 1994). In the study of single mother households the focus was shifted from why fathers leave, fail to maintain contact, or experience separation from their children to examining the complex lives and challenges of

unmarried and divorced women rearing children. This literature added to the discussion of children's changing parental environments as well.

From an ecological perspective, the boundaries of households and the roles of financiers are important but too narrow to assess the critical and broad question of fathers' presence and their unique contribution to child development. The complex of father-child, mother-child, mother-father, and mother-child-father relations and interactions described is referred to as the psychological ecology of the child.

This review discusses the research on father absence and child development. It is expected that the unique contributions of fathers to the developmental outcomes of their children will be better understood as a result of these empirical researches. Indeed, greater insights into the nature and consequence of father presence should become evident. The review then assesses what the other perspectives on residential and nonresidential fathers have to offer in support of or as challenges to more traditional views. The review concludes with a brief discussion on research directions, policy implications, and recommendations.

FATHER-ABSENCE PARADIGM: DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD OUTCOMES

Studies of father absence have identified children's behavioral, academic, and social problems, each with unique features linked to their developmental stages. Three major emphases are identified in the literature: intellectual or academic effects of father absence; gender-specific issues associated with psychosexual identity and development; and general behavioral adjustment and aggression in males. Other studies focus on social support, mental health, and other aspects of well-being in life course adjustment.

Academic Performance, Cognitive Development, and Intellectual Functioning

A major focus of the research on father absence has been on its effect on the intellectual and school performance of children. Lessing, Zagorin, and Nelson (1970) found children in father-absent households had lower IQ, verbal, and performance scores than children in father-present households. However, Hunt and Hunt (1977) found race and class were factors in related variables such as aspirations, with lower income children having lower aspirations. According to Mott (1994), girls are more likely to be helped with poor school performance if the father is not in the home. By comparison, girls in homes where fathers are residential can be more negatively cognitively affected (Mott, 1994; Radin, 1981), particularly in middle childhood (some distance from the father appears to increase positive cognitive outcomes). Atkinson and Ogston (1974) determined father-absent and father-present children performed equally well in school and were involved in many activities at home and at school. Boys' academic performance is typically reported as being impaired by father absence (Biller, 1974; Hetherington, Camara, & Featherman, 1983; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978). Further, the academic success of boys is unaffected by the teacher's gender (Schell & Courtney, 1979), suggesting parenting roles or parent-like involvement may be more meaningful than male models for male behavior or mere exposure to adult males. In these studies a variety of variables have been accounted for, including gender, age of child, and onset of change in father residence. Among them, gender appears to be a major source of variation in academic performance and cognitive skills. Perhaps more significant are the untested mediating variables in many studies, including father-child interaction, gender stereotyped parental attitudes, and child-rearing strategies, contributing to these developments in boys' and girls' academic performance.

Assessing intellectual functioning in relation to family structure is difficult at best. Shinn (1978) reviewed 54 studies of father absence that assessed math, reading, verbal, and intelligence

scores of male and female children. Of these, 28 were deemed of adequate quality to be included in a discussion identifying important factors for consideration in the comparison of one- and two-parent families. Slightly more than half of the studies found that father absence had a negative effect on the stated indicators of cognitive functioning; nine were mixed or found no differences between groups; and three found positive effects. Although numerous factors were identified in this process, relations between factors or variables that might have mediating effects on one another could not be addressed in this kind of review.

Other variables from the studies reviewed by Shinn (1978) were either not assessed or inconsistently incorporated into the studies reviewed. Generally, interpreting findings without adjustments for test bias related to race, culture, class, and gender weakens the explanatory power of these findings. Other confounds must be addressed, such as single parenting, which reduces the amount of the parent's time with each child and, therefore, the child's cognitive stimulation. Although children of divorce experience disruption of academic performance in the aftermath, within two years most children return to their normal patterns of performance. Boys experience greater disruption and girls experience greater recovery of their academic performance. Interestingly, girls experience challenges to their emotional stability, but their school success is somewhat enhanced by father absence.

Psychological/Emotional Development and Well-being

Studies on the psychological vulnerability of children from father-absent or nonresidential households suggest that these children are more likely to experience emotional disorders (Baydar, 1988) and depression (Amato, 1991) as compared with father-present households. These effects have been found to be mediated by marital status and educational attainment in adulthood (Amato & Keith, 1991). White men are the most dramatically affected by this childhood circumstance followed by White women and then Black women. Cross-generational predictions of SES attainment were least successful with men of color. Among African American single mothers, McLoyd , Jayaratne, et al (1994) found children's decreased well-being was tied to mothers' depression but was mediated by the mother's economic situation. Children temporarily experience a decrease in well-being in transitioning from one-parent to two-parent stepfather households (Baydar, 1988). In adulthood, no differences have been found among individuals reared in divorced/single or two-parent families, other than adults from two-parent families report that they experienced happy marriages of their parents in childhood (Greenburg & Nay, 1982).

Although careful controls may be applied in studies comparing generations, predicting intergenerational effects related to family structure carries with it the burden of changing family trends (Amato & Keith, 1991; Greenburg & Nay, 1982). Large scale surveys rarely control for historical events in the assessment of intergenerational effects. As an example, Elder's (1974) study of cohort effects carefully accounted for historical influences in predicting parent-child relations and child outcomes from generation to generation.

Effects on Girls

Effects of father absence have been identified among girls (Bee, 1974), with many effects varying greatly by ethnicity (Hunt & Hunt, 1977) and SES status (McAdoo, 1993; McLoyd, 1990). Nevertheless, in contrast to boys' academic success, achievement among girls is less likely to be associated with household residence of fathers. Although nonresidence of fathers appears to be associated with low self-esteem for girls, other frequently associated outcomes are increased, including school achievement among White girls (Hunt & Hunt, 1977) and fewer negative sanctions for assertive behavior, perhaps as a consequence of a more gender neutral environment

'Mott, 1994). In adulthood, SES attainment may be affected by some combination of long-term poverty and father absence. Hetherington (1972) emphasized the more promiscuous attitudes of girls in father-absent households and the difficulty of these girls in forming or maintaining romantic relations later in their development. Few other studies corroborated the issue of promiscuity at any age. However, other studies found the formation of romantic relations to be more difficult for adolescent or adult women from father-absent households.

Psychosexual Development

Studies have suggested the long-term consequences of father absence primarily because of divorce include the development of inappropriate sex role attitudes (Biller & Weiss, 1970), promiscuity, and interpersonal problems with romantic relations (Hetherington, 1972; Hetherington et al., 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). Long-term effects for girls reared in single mother homes include early marriage and early pregnancy, births while single, increased likelihood of divorce, and increased remarriage (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). Among these findings Black/White differences are not emphasized, although the effects are much stronger for Euro-American girls. Hetherington (1972) found early family disruption, prior to the child's fifth birthday, resulted in more permissive attitudes and behaviors among both Black and White girls. In a study designed to test Hetherington's findings among Black and White college girls, no differences were found between girls with residential fathers and those with nonresidential fathers on sex role attitudes, romantic love, and relations with males (Hainline & Feig, 1978). Similarly, Eberhardt and Schill (1984) found the sexual attitudes of Black low-income adolescent girls were no different because of father presence or absence. However, loss of the father before age five was associated with greater approval seeking (Eberhardt & Schill, 1984).

Little empirical inquiry has been devoted to behavioral outcomes for girls in the father-absence literature. Much of what is available focuses upon their psychosexual development. Some authors discuss promiscuity as behavior, in their measurement of attitudes toward sexuality. Also, for some researchers, assertive qualities are categorized as masculine, resulting in the conclusion that father absence leads to inappropriate sex role identification (Biller & Weiss, 1970). In sum, girls appear to suffer emotional destabilization, but not impaired academic performance when fathers are nonresidents. However, caution is warranted in drawing even this conclusion from primarily correlational studies of retrospective data. Moreover, given the expectations of the literature and measurement strategies and criteria that may have reinforced a cultural ideal interpretation of failure to meet this criteria may have resulted in classification of adolescent and college students as atypical or destabilized. Similarly, the literature, the development of measures, and the criteria for healthy relations on the part of adolescent girls and college women may have been informed by the cultural ideal of the period. Failure to meet this criteria may have resulted in these studies' interpretation of these women's attitudes and behaviors as unstable and certainly atypical.

Effects on Boys

Males are disproportionately assessed in the context of father absence. Impaired contact or lack of contact with fathers appears to have its most dramatic effects on male children (e.g., Bee, 1974; Hetherington et al., Cox, 1978; Mott, 1994). Of particular concern are masculine identity development (Mitchell & Wilson, 1967), school success, and social prowess as essential ingredients of successful integration into adult American life and the fulfillment of the male provider role (Cazenave, 1979). Findings across studies indicate these effects can be short term, long term, or recurring in the lives of males (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington & Camara, 1988; Hetherington et al., 1978).

Ethnic Variation

Among ethnic minorities, African Americans are the least likely to live in two-parent families. Approximately 29% of Blacks (Mott, 1994; Randolph, 1995), 67% of Latinos (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988), over 85% of Asians (Barringer, Gardner, & Levin, 1993; Chan, 1991), and 70% of American Indians (Snipp, 1986, 1995) live in two-parent families. Among Asian Americans and Native Americans, little empirical work sheds light upon the effects of residence and nonresidence of fathers, in part because among Asians Americans, this circumstance is relatively uncommon. This is also true for American Indians, whose percentage represents a very recent decline in two-parent families. Nonresidence of fathers is more common among urban Native Americans than those in Native American reservations (Snipp, 1995). The literature focuses upon African American and Hispanic families because single parent households are disproportionately represented among these groups.

According to a recent paper by Mott (1994), White males but not Black males are more likely than females to have fathers present in the home. Despite boys' general advantages, they are clearly more vulnerable than girls to reduced contact with their fathers. Mott (1994) found patterns for father presence and sustained contact with children while fathers were residing elsewhere differed among Black and White youth. Two-parent families are two to three times more common among White youth than Black youth. However, among Black fathers not residing in the homes of their children, frequent weekly visits were nearly one-and-a-half times more common than among White fathers. After four years of separation, contact with children dropped off for all fathers (Mott, 1994; Seltzer, 1991b). However, White fathers were more likely to become infrequent visitors to their children than Black fathers.

Contact and Cognition Environment. Ethnic variations are common in the literature on father absence. Because of their cultural values and close family ties, Latino fathers usually maintain contact with nonresidential children (Alvirez & Bean, 1976; Alvirez, Bean, & Williams, 1981). Seltzer & Bianchi (1988) argue in contrast to this view, suggesting that the emphasis is placed upon maintaining marriages but that once Latino fathers live outside the home, contact with their children is severed fairly quickly. Higher socioeconomic status, closer proximity to child residence, and greater participation in decision making or activities increase contact across ethnic groups (Seltzer, 1991b).

However, both similarities and differences exist in the patterns of contact among Black and White fathers. Terminated residence of fathers from family households is more clearly associated with negative cognitive consequences for Euro-American boys, but is less clear and more mixed for African American boys. There are two possible explanations for these differences linked to culture and methodology. First, following Euro-American fathers' terminated residence, because of a variety of factors, contact with their children may dwindle more quickly until father-child visits are rare or nonexistent (Santrock, 1977). Euro-American male children are then at greater risk of losing contact with their fathers and the benefits of father presence after their fathers leave the household. The boundaries of household residence are less rigid for Black boys because their fathers are much more likely to maintain contact despite changes in residence or having never shared a residence with their children.

Ethnic Variation and Methodological Issues

Yet another possible explanation for the variation in patterns for different ethnic groups has to do with the design and methodology of early studies on father absence (Marino & McCowan, 1976). These investigations often confounded race and class by studying low income African-

American families (e.g. Biller, 1968) and sometimes comparing them to working class or middle class White families. However, when Biller (1968) compared low income Black and White boys in father-present and father-absent households, race was not associated with masculinity scores. In later studies of the association between father locale, contact frequency, and masculinity, income is typically controlled or distributed among Black and White comparison groups (Mott, 1994; Santrock, 1977). Much of the early father-absence literature focused on low income Black boys, without disentangling poverty and racial status (Johnson, 1995; Moynihan, 1965; Slaughter, 1988; Wilson, 1987). Also, the average configuration of Black families has changed from the 1960s, when only 25% of African-American children were living in single-parent, primarily poor, homes. In the 1990s, 54% of African American children are born into poverty, and 65% percent are living with a single parent at any given time.

Masculinity and Sex Role Development

Sex role stereotyping and gender identity development among children has been a controversial area of study regarding the influence of nonresidential fathers. Biller (1968, 1969a, 1969b, 1970; 1971a; 1974) was a predominant force in the father-absence literature prior to the 1980s. His work focused primarily on sex role development, masculinity, and aggression among boys (1968; 1969a; 1969b). His findings and the findings of others have indicated boys growing up without the presumed benefit of father household presence are less masculine, even effeminate, with a likely developmental outcome of homosexuality. Other studies describe boys with nonresidential fathers as more masculine (Hetherington, 1972; Santrock, 1977). Herzog and Sudia (1973) found insufficient empirical evidence to confirm hypermasculinity or less masculine identities among boys in father-absent homes. A systematic review of the literature on sex role stereotyping and gender identity found the evidence for a relationship between father presence or absence and children's sex role development to be inconclusive (Herzog & Sudia, 1973). Consistent with the work of Herzog and Sudia (1973), were findings from a recent review of Lesbian and Gay parents. Patterson (1994) concluded that children of divorced mother-headed lesbian parents did not have gender identity confusion and were no different in the gender role behaviors in early and middle childhood than children of their heterosexual cohorts. Similarly, in a review of masculinity and gender roles, Lamb (1996b) concludes that sex role development is more influenced by warmth and closeness in the father-son relationship than by the father's own masculinity.

Moreover, numerous constructs have been measured under the rubric of sex roles, and findings naturally vary according to what is being measured (Stevenson & Black, 1988). Brenes, Eisenburg, and Helmstadter (1985) found the acquisition of gender concepts did not differ among preschool children from one-parent and two-parent families. Boys from one-parent families were not more feminine, but were less sex typed in their choice of toys. These data underscore the distinction between masculine behaviors and attitudes depicting masculinity. Numerous studies have found sons of residential fathers are more likely than sons of nonresidential fathers to adopt masculine attitudes and preferences (e.g., for play and toys) (Biller, 1968, 1969a, 1969b; Brenes et al., 1985). However, sons of nonresidential fathers are more likely to report stereotypically masculine behaviors including aggression (Badaines, 1976; Boone, 1979). Many of the new or adapted measures include scores for androgyny, and considerations are made for children's gender neutral exposure and preference for toys.

The literature on masculinity and psychosexual development, particularly in male children, is a central arena of the father-absence paradigm (Mitchell & Wilson, 1967). This is also the place where the cultural ideal of the 1950s intersects with the research and development of conceptual

and methodological issues. When Biller conducted much of his work, masculine stereotypes in fathering were the norm. As the research arena for studying fathers' parenting roles has expanded and other social changes have occurred, greater values for androgyny in interpersonal relations with males have overtaken masculine stereotypes; at least this is true in the main (Lamb, 1987). These social changes leave the findings and measures of this period in question as the view of healthy female and male characteristics has changed significantly. Independence and assertiveness are encouraged in girls. Nurturance, interdependence, and expression of feelings are encouraged in young boys. The operational definitions central to some of these previous studies would now change dramatically in many instances. If the data from some of Biller's work were now rescored, would significant findings disappear?

Aggression. Younger children, particularly boys, in father-absent households have been described as more vulnerable, with more aggressive behaviors (i.e., Montare & Bonne, 1980) and sex role confusion, compared with children in father-present households (Biller, 1969a;1974, 1982). These effects are less prominent for older children, and girls demonstrate fewer negative consequences in terms of sex role development (Biller, 1971b; Hetherington, 1972; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1981; Radin, 1981).

Across numerous studies, Biller argued that the greater male aggressive behaviors found in boys with nonresidential fathers is due to early identification, feminine etiology, and lack of male modeling socialization toward true masculinity. Broude (1990) challenged this thesis in a qualitative cross-cultural study of 55 nations. He argued that some societies value hypermasculinity and aggression in men and thus create cultural imperatives toward this end. Father availability tends to have an attenuating effect on whether individual boys exhibit aggressive tendencies. This argument suggests sex role conflict and its expression, aggression, is the indirect effect of inconsistent contact with the father.

Additional investigation into ethnicity, boys' aggressive behaviors, and nonresidential fathers reveals cultural variations in children's response to the ecology of the household circumstance. Black/White and Black/Latino differences in aggressive behaviors of boys in middle childhood or early adolescence are rare (Badaines, 1976; Biller, 1968; Mott, 1994; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Barclay and Cusumano (1967) found father-absent Black boys were more passive than father-absent White boys. On the basis of this evidence, passive and dependent characteristics of boys, especially Black boys, were linked to a compensatory identification with hypermasculinity. Although differences in masculine attitudes and aggressive behaviors could not be attributed to residential location of fathers, Latino boys, in comparison with African-American and Euro-American boys, were more aggressive and identified more strongly with the machismo image (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988).

These findings suggest that certain behaviors associated with social change may be controlled by a community of men and women, fathers and mothers, grandparents, and others who sanction or curtail behaviors, but masculine attitudes appear to be the strongest avenue of influence for residential fathers. However, this interaction is likely complicated because aggressive attitudes by these influential parents are not paired with like behaviors. This dynamic is worthy of additional study.

THE SINGLE PARENT PARADIGM: POVERTY AND SOCIALIZATION

The context of single mother families is linked inextricably to economic issues. Children of single mothers develop in families that may experience sudden drops in their standard of living (particularly for divorced women), or disparate poverty (for disproportionate numbers of children of color). Mothers in both of these groups struggle to maintain consistent child support and parenting relations with nonresidential fathers (Jarrett, 1994). Economic marginality creates numerous challenges for parenting. Empirically, the challenge is to distinguish poverty effects from presumed familial structure effects. Childrearing and parent-child relations in these single parent family configurations require adjustments, which are briefly discussed later in this review.

The Economic Well-being of Children

Research on single mothers represents a critical and newly expanding literature that shifts its focus from nonresidential fathers to the lives of mothers and their relationships with fathers and with the institutions that "replace" fathers in one way or another. This literature brings us back to the ongoing context of the home environment of the child who is not living with the biological father. In the revitalized study of single-mother or mother-only families, the litany of negative outcomes for children includes poor academic performance, lower educational attainment, and early pregnancy, with the single most critical predictor being loss of income (McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Sandefur & McLanahan, 1994; McLindon, 1987; McLoyd, 1992). The loss of income variable refers to the pre-existing context of marriage, not the circumstance of never married women, of which African-American women are a disproportionate number (Randolph, 1995). Further, McLoyd (1990) makes the argument that lost income also refers to income not received as a consequence of gender and racial discrimination in the underemployment and unemployment of women. Single mothers have the highest poverty rates of any group in the United States (McLanahan & Booth, 1989), and African-American single mothers are more than twice as poor as Euro-American single mothers (Dickerson, 1995; Edelman, 1987). Among the numerous negative outcomes affecting children in single mother homes, while much can be attributed to their poor economic status (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994) this issue of family structure and economics is a major confound in the literature on father absence.

Never married mothers share with divorced single mothers the problem of unpaid child support (McLanahan & Booth, 1989). Evidence exists that the poverty of children separated from their fathers can be unnecessarily punitive. Hill (1992) determined that the biological father's direct support to the child decreased as a result of the mother's remarriage but not in relation to his own remarriage. Moreover, fathers of poor children from separated or divorced families are themselves not necessarily financially marginal or poor fathers, even if these fathers are supporting other biological or step children.

Children living with single parents experience the consequences of lost income in poor living conditions, including poorer housing (Edelman, 1987) and health risks (Angel & Worobey, 1988). This lack of financial support also causes increased parental role burden, which reduces parents' time for each child in the family (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985), and increased stress (McLanahan 1983; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994; McLoyd, 1990). In addition, reduced economic support is associated with problem behavior in children (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987).

The foundation of the single parent paradigm is certainly the economic viability of the family. However, the melding of women's economic issues and issues of children of poverty has yielded a deeply contextualized discussion in this research arena. Moreover, there appears to be a rich

discussion of parent-child context and the nature of the interactions within that context. Finally the interrelations of those factors with family dynamics, roles, and parental (mother) attitudes and their association with child outcomes are likewise addressed in this literature.

Family Functioning and Socialization

Compared with discipline in two-parent homes, single mothers tend to be more strict and to believe more direct punishment is necessary for their children. African-American single mothers are more stressed and reliant upon their children to behave in adult ways. They confide in their children about financial matters and other adult stressors (McLoyd et al., 1994). McLoyd and colleagues (1994) reported children in single parent homes, especially girls, have more responsibility at an earlier age, such as childcare, household duties, cooking, cleaning, and minor grocery shopping. In contrast to these findings, Atkinson and Ogston (1974) found girls' and boys' responsibilities were about the same regardless of family configuration. Perhaps the McLoyd et al. (1994) finding reflects cultural differences in the socialization of flexible role responsibilities, a more common feature among African-American families (Martin & Martin, 1978; Wilson, 1984 ;1986). The more financial difficulties experienced by parents, the more likely their children's well-being and positive view of their parents will be diminished (McLoyd et al., 1994). Green and Crooks (1988) assessed mother self-esteem, depression, parent-child problems, and family cohesion, competence, and adaptability. Married mothers and divorced or single mothers were no different on individual measures, nor did their adolescent children perceive them as different. Among a minority of families having scores in the clinical range no significant differences were found by marital status. Children with clinical scores were not significantly more likely to be in single parent homes than in other family structures.

The strength of the single-parent paradigm is that it primarily exists in an ecological framework where parent-child relations and their developmental benefits and consequences are well articulated. Although this work may set the stage for a more complex understanding of father presence and how research on father presence might be conducted, it does not alone or directly address that paradigm.

DIVORCE: AN ALTERNATIVE SINGLE PARENT PARADIGM

The Importance of the Divorce Process: Marital Disruption

Critical to understanding child outcomes of divorce is viewing divorce as a process (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978; Wallerstein, 1987) and not an isolated event in the life of the child. The process of divorce likely encompasses declining marital relations, a family context to which the child is exposed for an extended time. In the aftermath of the divorce the child's stressful familial experience may be culminated. Few studies have ascertained what children may have witnessed prior to the divorce, nor have they controlled for these factors when attempting to predict child outcomes from fathers' presence or absence. Predivorce conflict may have greater explanatory power in predicting child outcomes than changes in father residence and contact (Lamb, 1987). The literature on marital disruption is useful because it often captures the process of divorce and its effects upon children.

Father-child relations change in the most significant ways during the decline of a marriage. According to Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine and Volling (1991), fathers were more intrusive and exhibited more negative interactions with their children if their love for their wives had dwindled and the durability of their marriage was uncertain. Interpretation of these data yields not that parental interaction declines with a declining marriage, but insensitivity to and disengagement from one's partner appears also to evidence itself in one's relations to one's child.

If a marriage begins to decline early, young children are more likely to experience the context of that decline because their parents are more likely to stay together (Waite & Lillard, 1991). This tendency on the part of parents during a vulnerable stage in their child's life increases the likelihood of negative consequences throughout that child's life. From a child's perspective, marital disruption plays no favorites with regards to whether parents stay together or divorce. The marital status of the parents of adult children of divorce did not differ by their retrospective memories of their parents' relations as happy or unhappy (Greenburg & Nay, 1982); that is adult children of divorced parents were not more likely to remember marital discord. Moreover, Greenburg and Nay (1982) also found adult children of marriages dissolved from divorce or death of a parent were no more likely to be unstable than those of two-parent families. The authors concluded that skills of adult children for discerning healthy parental and marital roles could be derived from the "lesson" of divorce and the parental recognition and termination of a dysfunctional relationship.

The Context of Divorce

The transition to one-parent family status often occurs in the aftermath of divorce. An important determinant of the vulnerability of the child following divorce and the separation of the father from the household is the developmental period in which this separation takes place. Despite lack of controls for the divorce process, there is consistent evidence that early onset of father separation increases the negative consequences to children irrespective of gender (Furstenberg & Allison, 1985; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988; Santrock, 1972). However, boys not sharing residence with their fathers have been described as aggressive, particularly toward their mothers (Hetherington, 1972; Santrock, 1977).

Developmentally, children who experience divorce in middle childhood or early adolescence where remarriage does not immediately follow exhibit less dramatic behavioral consequences of the divorce. Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison (1987) found that 11- to 16-year-old children who had infrequent versus frequent contact with their fathers were not at greater risk for psychological stress, academic problems, or problem behavior. The research of Hetherington et al. (1978) supports the notion that children's behavior problems and distress are likely to subside 2-5 years after a divorce, so that no differences are found among these children who may have adjusted to varying levels of contact with their fathers. Moreover, it could be that children of divorces arrived at through more amiable means or with little child exposure to marital discord or a traumatic divorce process may exhibit few or none of the negative consequences discussed in this section.

Children of Gay and Lesbian parents disproportionately fall under the category of divorce. Most children of gay and lesbian parents were born into heterosexual relationships in which one or both parents later "come out". Children in these circumstances may have the benefit of three or more primary parents, where particularly fathers, typically the nonresidential parent, remain active in the lives of their children (it should be noted that research on this population has been conducted among middle and upper income families). According to Patterson (1994), children in these families are no more and no less vulnerable to the aftermath of divorce.

Divorce affects the population of African American children differently as well. Nearly 65% of Black children are living in single parent homes. However, the circumstances and lifestyles creating this configuration (Bane, 1986; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989) are more diverse than in previous times. A smaller proportion of these families exist as a consequence of divorce. Thus, the study of father absence or single parenting in contemporary African-American households involves a much more diverse population socioeconomically, despite the increased percentage of low income families. The inconsistencies in studies of father absence and cognitive development

conducted with African American families may be due to these socioeconomic and lifestyle differences.

UNDERSTANDING THE ECOLOGY OF FATHER PRESENCE

Years ago Pederson (1976) argued that understanding the developmental outcomes of children was not informed greatly by the father-absence paradigm. In particular, understanding the psychological ecology of children with respect to fathers was not aided by the father-absence literature, which avoided the study of psychological processes related to person-environment issues. He argued that the research on father-child interaction and marital interaction should be expanded to remedy the gaps left by the father-absence literature. In the nearly 20 years since Pederson's publication, this literature expanded; however, the relation of psychological process and father influence is still in need of development.

As the field moved toward contextualizing father-child interactions and care, research on paternal caregiving and father involvement appeared. These works provided the pathway to the conceptualization and study of the psychological ecology of father presence.

Father Care: Beyond Family Structure

The father care literature has moved beyond a reliance on family structure as an assumed indicator of meaningful father-child interactions, toward the measurement of father behaviors, attitudes, parent-parent relations, father-child relations, and processes. Adult development and relationships are particularly emphasized as they relate to the processes and relations described above and ultimately to children's development.

Studies of father care show that fathers are involved with their children to varying degrees and participate in a variety of childrearing functions (Lamb, 1981; Parke & O'Leary, as cited in Lamb, 1981; Parke & Sawin, 1976). Fathers' play styles differ from mothers' play styles with infants; fathers use more of their time with their infants engaged in play (Parke, 1981), and that play is more vigorous than mothers' play (Clarke-Stewart, 1978). Variations in the play styles of fathers and mothers suggest that fathers offer unique play experiences to their children. The stimulation the child receives through play episodes with parents links to developmental outcomes in cognitive skills and sociability.

Secure attachment is understood to be an important feature of adjustment in infants and children, much of which is organized in the child's earliest experiences. The mother is presumed to be the only attachment figure before Lamb, among other researchers, conducted a series of studies to determine the conditions under which infants and toddlers preferred mothers over fathers (e.g., Lamb, 1976a, 1977a, 1977b). Attachment relations were not restricted to mothers. Children chose the available parent under distress, and when both parents were available, the mother was preferred. Studies of father care attempt to predict what increases father attention, activities, and involvement with children (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Cowan & Cowan, 1987; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Marsiglio, 1995). Far fewer studies link these activities to developmental outcomes of children.

In a correlational study on childrearing and father care, Radin (1981) found highly involved fathers from two-parent families had children who scored higher on internal locus of control and had girls whose verbal intelligence scores were higher. Among college women well adjusted in their academic setting, most reported positive involvement of their fathers (Fish & Biller, 1973). Studies of attachment that included fathers became important, in part, as evidence indicating the involvement of fathers with their children. Infants and two-year-old children demonstrated similar

preferences for fathers and mothers in studies of separation anxiety (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Lamb, 1976a, 1977a).

The literature contains many examples of fathers' participation in childcare being related to mothers' work patterns (Baruch & Barnett, 1981; Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Marsiglio, 1991). Among African-American fathers this linkage has not held for involvement in childcare (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992). However, an important contradiction in the literature on Euro-American father care is embodied in the finding that fathers who were satisfied with employment and enjoyed their work were found to be more sensitive and responsive to their five-year-old children; however, the careers they enjoyed were quite demanding on their time and left little time for care and interaction with their children (Grossman, Golding, & Pollack, 1988).

Another important finding is that fathers' care in two-parent families ebbs and flows with role responsibilities and perceived quality of care given by the mother (e.g., Grossman, Golding, & Pollack, 1988). For children with nonresidential fathers, poor or lax care by mothers cannot be compensated for as easily. We know stepfathers do not attend to their stepchildren as they do their biological children. We also know in extended family households roles and boundaries are quite complex as regards the care and rearing of children (Apfel & Seitz, 1991; Burton & Bengston 1987; Pearson, Hunter, Ensminger, & Kellam, 1990; Wilson, 1984, 1986a, 1986b).

The literature on father care, involvement, and interaction has several characteristics that present limitations for the development of a broad framework of father presence. One limitation is that much of this work is on fathers with infants in which outcomes are not studied or are assessed in the near future of the child (6 months to 2 years later). Other studies merely extrapolate father-child related outcomes from research on mother-infant research. Another criticism of the research is that in places where father behaviors and interactions with children have been clearly established to later child outcomes (e.g., play styles), the effect of having multiple parents versus the unique offerings of father parenting (father-specific parenting) have not been adequately disentangled. Despite this particular issue, this area of father presence does push the paradigm beyond locale and economic contributions of fathers.

FATHER PRESENCE: TOWARD LINKING FATHER-SPECIFIC PARENTING WITH CHILD OUTCOMES

This section touches on the work of a few researchers who insist upon the "flip side" of the paradigm, that father presence matters. They attempt to move the concept of father presence beyond and the fulfillment of roles and locale, to an understanding of the multifaceted essence of fatherhood and its implications for the developing child.

Fathers may provide a model and techniques of control and discipline that cause boys living with their fathers to perceive them as effectively exerting control upon their sons (Atkinson & Ogston, 1974). Broude (1990) suggests residential fathers reduce aggressive behaviors in boys by attenuating the effects of American cultural messages valuing hypermasculinity in men. Boys may perceive fathers as less emotionally supportive when they are residential because they fail to reinforce hypermasculinity (Mott, 1994).

Numerous studies have emphasized that availability, contact, and parental involvement with fathers reduces aggressive behaviors in boys (Biller, 1968, 1969a, 1971a; Broude, 1990; Mott, 1994; Santrock, 1977). Substantive contact, participation, and involvement of fathers improves the well-being of younger children (Furstenberg, et al., 1987; Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992; McAdoo, 1993). Middle class fathers spend more time with their children and are more nurturant and supportive than working class fathers, particularly when children are young (Erikson &

Gecas, 1991). Studies of middle class African American fathers have similar findings (Cazenave, 1979; McAdoo, 1986). As other researchers have established critical periods for changes in father contact, household configurations, in early and middle childhood, Furstenberg and Harris (1993) established critical periods in adolescence for changes in contact with their fathers at ages 15-17 and about 20, particularly for African-American children. Other periods in adolescence produced little or no effect on outcomes in either direction (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987).

Sufficient evidence exists that continued contact with nonresidential fathers who are loving, supportive, and nurturant increases emotional well-being and adjustment of female children (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Mott, 1994). This effect is consistent into early adulthood (Draughn & Waggenspack, 1986; Fish & Biller, 1973). Positive father-daughter relations of residential fathers in childhood can buffer depressive outcomes of women (Brook, Whiteman, Brook, & Gordon, 1983) and bolster self-esteem (Young & Parrish, 1977). By contrast, in another study of college women only 9% of self-concept development and male/female dynamics could be attributed to residence or nonresidence of fathers (Bannon & Southern, 1980).

Barriers exist for nonresidential fathers seeking to develop close and effective parenting relations with their children. These fathers are less likely than residential fathers to be in contact with their children, especially when a stepfather is in residence (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Under the condition of shared residence, clearer rules can be established and distinct father responsibilities maintained. In this context, fathers find parenting more manageable (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994).

The psychological ecology of a child reflects the intricacies and complexities of visual, tactile, emotional, and verbal and nonverbal caregiver-child interactions and relationships. These interactions and relationships take place in a variety of contexts that impinge upon and influence those interactions and relations (i.e., marital discord, culture, class, historical periods, parental work patterns). Boss's (1977) notion of the psychological presence of fathers was supported in a study of military families in which the father was temporarily missing from the dynamics of the family by virtue of duties away. Boss suggested that families members operated to sustain the father role even in his absence. Krampe and Fairweather (1993) further contextualize this view by describing the contribution of mother and father changes in internal states (including development with the infant or child as catalyst) that occur as a consequence of their interactions with each other on behalf of the infant and with the infant directly.

Krampe and Fairweather (1993) push the father presence paradigm beyond tangible parenting influences to the intricacies of adult personalities and the ebb and flow of triadic interactions that include children but also then influence them. This complex of interactions and intangibles creates a kind of psychological ecology for the child that contributes to development in overt and subtle ways. Men's psychological care and emotional generosity (expressiveness and intimacy) with their children appear to have the greatest long-term implications for children's development. Middle class Jewish noncustodial fathers were shown to be concerned about the emotional life of their children and their children's expressiveness as a consequence of their frequent or infrequent contact with them (Greif, 1979). Men's psychological care and emotional generosity with their children appear to have the greatest long-term implications for children's development. Grossman, Pollack, and Golding (1988) provided evidence that children take strong cues from the psychological ecology of their development in which fathers are quite influential. In this regard, Grossman et al. (1988) found fathers' autonomy and affiliation, assessed 5 years earlier, predicted similar characteristics in their children at age five and a half. Maladaptive characteristics, defined as

the capacity for separation and closeness (i.e., detachment, isolation, distance), could similarly be predicted, and thus linked to children's early psychological development.

The physical care fathers give is often so little that it may be difficult to accurately assess its importance in the development of children. As men's roles continue to change and perhaps they assume a greater share of parenting, our ability to assess the developmental impact of fathers' physical care may increase. At present, few concrete empirical examples are available. Some empirical attention has been devoted to emotional development of children and fathering. This research often addresses the issues of "loss" for children and the change in the nature of psychological and emotional influence. In the case of some single parent families, or of orphaned children, how do we account for the "lost" interaction if fathers who have never been a part of their children's psychological life? The mother who appears to have effective coping and support skills will perceive the need and fill the gap through some means—another male partner, extended family involvement, or the development of family-like friendships (McLanahan, Wedemeyer, & Adelberg, 1981).

SUMMARY

In order to understand the state of empirical research on father presence, the critical review of three major literatures was undertaken: father absence, single parent families, and divorced families. A more narrow discussion of father absence or an emphasis on studies using the term father presence might have limited the range of available research contributing to current thinking on father presence.

Findings from largely correlational studies of father absence reflect that non residence of fathers has differential effects on boys and girls. Alternatively unique findings associated with gender may be explained by the variation in the focus of inquiry for these two groups. Boys, especially Euro-American and Hispanic boys, experience more academic and social disruption when fathers are non resident, and this increases when there is little or no contact between fathers and sons. Fathers of African American boys maintain somewhat more contact with their sons. Boys from families with non residential fathers exhibit more aggressive behaviors; and there is no good evidence that these boys are more likely to be homosexual, although they may be more androgenous in attitudes and play. Boys with fathers in the home have more traditionally masculine attitudes, but not aggressive behaviors.

Among girls, there is evidence that academic performance is either unaffected or minimally negatively affected by residential patterns of fathers. Rather, certain aspects of academic performance were enhanced by father's absence from the household. Precociousness in childhood, promiscuity in adolescence, and difficult romantic relations in adulthood were among the widespread perceptions of the trajectory of girls from families with non residential fathers. Our review suggests that there is some short term disruption of the child's psychological well-being. However, ideas about precociousness and promiscuity generally reflect non traditional attitudes, not behaviors in girls or adult women.

The single parent literature emphasizes the economic disadvantages of children with non residential fathers. This literature underscores the importance of disembedding 1) child outcomes linked to poverty from those associated with residential patterns of fathers, as well as 2) parenting by multiple adults versus father-specific parenting. Although single mothers can successfully rear their children, evidence was highlighted that some African American single mothers desire to have the fathers of their children involved in parenting and decision making as unique contributors to their children's rearing irrespective of economic considerations.

Non residential fathers in the context of divorce add several complex dimensions to issues of family structure, father contact, and parenting processes. There are numerous findings that in the 2 year period following divorce, children, especially boys, experience disruptions of similar types to those described in the father absence literature. (Studies that may also include divorced and never-married families without distinguishing them.) These disruptions include: problems with academic performance, aggression, withdrawal, etc. However, other literature that attempts to describe the impact of the predivorce environment on children. Here the problem of design becomes one where child outcomes cannot be disembedded from previous marital problems of parents, rather than simply structural changes in the household. Generally, the evidence suggests that with appropriate parental support the problems experienced in the aftermath of divorce subside and, for most children, extinguish completely.

Studies centrally focused upon father presence were few. There are some studies of father involvement, particularly in the instrumental care of their children, and another small body of work on father child interactions in play situations. Fathers care more for their children than in previous times, but their care activities are limited and still far less than mother's care. Infants and toddlers enjoy play with their fathers, whose activities are distinguishable from those of their mothers. Fathers may influence their children's personality development in very subtle ways, implying that their physical presence and contact with their child(ren) is critical for these understudied processes.

Finally, numerous methodological problems plague this literature. The field has largely been defined by descriptive research with small samples where major issues with covariation could not be controlled or addressed. More recent studies include larger samples and have begun to address the problems associated with control variables. Still few of these larger scale studies address process and quality interactions with children of various ages. Moreover, much of the early literature excludes diverse racial and ethnic groups. In the father absence literature many studies did included Blacks, however, race was often confounded with class, such that poor African Americans were compared with working class or middle class EuroAmericans. Some of these problems have be addressed in more of the recent literature, nevertheless; Hispanic, but particularly Asian American and American Indian families are missing from the research currently available.

CONCLUSIONS

As a paradigm, father absence is a severely flawed construction of father roles, family functioning, and child outcomes, sorely limited by its emphasis on physical locale and contact patterns of biological fathers. Fiscal support and the fulfillment of the provider role by males have the typical effect of lifting children out of or preventing their descent into poverty. Buffering the poverty experience can increase the life chances of children irrespective of ethnicity or class. Practical and emotional presence have been shown to have positive effects on child outcomes and are valued by mothers rearing children alone (Jarrett, 1994). Physical absence of the father can make provider and practical aspects of parenting more challenging but not prohibitive.

Fathers are important as parents; however, complete or optimal parenting is not limited to a particular familial structure. Rather, certain childrearing objectives and socialization strategies and goals must be in place. Optimal parenting may be defined as the rearing of a child in a nurturing, loving, and safe environment where skills and ideals are engendered that enable the child to be a happy, whole, contributing member of society. Using this definition, many family configurations, irrespective of parental residence of either gender, can achieve this end if given proper supports.

Parenting is a role and type of relation to the child that fathers can and do affect through a variety of family types. For instance, the challenges to children of single mothers can be largely

predicted by the circumstances of poverty (i.e., increased maternal depression, low education, joblessness, underemployment, lack of support systems, and dangerous urban neighborhoods). A focus on the child would have us ask, "By what means can we improve the parenting context and the circumstances of the child?" Gadsden (1993) implored us as researchers and policymakers to promote a culture of child survival, such that we consider the rights and potential of the child and thus nurture these qualities to fruition.

The argument regarding family structure and parenting has little to do with whether fathers make unique contributions to the development of their children. The literature suggests that family structure does determine father contribution, and certainly father contact is enormously affected by family structure. However, in a father-presence paradigm, contact is only one facet of the fathers' contribution; the quality of that contact is the greater part and this characteristic of parenting is not determined by family structure. Researchers have asked whether we know this about parenting from the present state of the art (Pederson, 1976) or via presumed assumed linkages between father behavior or attitudes and child outcomes. The presumptions derive in part from assumed similarities in father based upon research conducted with mother/child. Too few researches actually test these linkages.

A preponderance of literature supports the importance of the provider or family financier role of fathers, a role that can be easily achieved through a variety of other means. A smattering of data suggests fathers' presence somehow affects the aggressive behaviors of boys, but we do not know through what processes this occurs. Evidence for the effect of father-child relations on the emotional development of children is provided by a few studies which indicate father support and involvement relate to the well-being of girls in young adulthood. Little evidence has been gathered on the psychological and emotional development of children and their relations with their fathers as a unique influence.

The consequences of divorce for children under 5 years of age may be partially explained by the shift in the psychological ecology of the child due to the major changes taking place when families dissolve in this way. The effects of these changes typically dissipate over the years according to Hetherington and her colleagues (i.e., Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978, 1982) and Wallerstein and her colleagues (i.e., Wallerstein, 1988). Yet, the effects on children at this young age are consistent, with little deference to mother's skills, (i.e., the reclaiming of routines in the family, etc.). Perhaps what children at this developmental stage cannot handle is the major shift in the psychological ecology.

Krampe and Fairweather (1993) argued theoretically for the concept of "parental coalition," that is, the psychic 'threeness' of the infant's internalized parent/self that fuses child, mother, and father together in the neonatal perspective. Empirical evidence from Grossman et al. (1988) established a powerful link between child personality development and early context of fathers. Again, we are left with little information on the nature of the processes that create this linkage. Nevertheless, it is suggestive of dynamic bidirectional context, much of which may be difficult to assess. The broader and more subtle ecology of the home may be the context from which children extract a great deal of information that is meaningful and powerfully influential in their development. These considerations are important for the future directions of research and policy.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Father presence matters for a variety of child outcomes. Most aspects of child development can be influenced by relationships with fathers. Research directions suggested below emphasize an ecological perspective in research on children and father presence. Our knowledge about the influence of father presence would be enhanced by some of the following:

1. Correlational and qualitative studies have been the central methodological approach to the study of father roles and relationships. New studies incorporating longitudinal, multimethod and predictive designs are needed to perpetuate the critical study of fathers, particularly as related to trajectory of children's lives. Moreover, much of the early work in which we have begun to understand the linkages between fathering processes and child outcomes has been conducted with very young children, primarily infants and toddlers. Future research should focus on individuals at various stages of development. Longitudinal designs will aid in achieving this objective.
2. Supplementary research emphasizing direct testing of presumed relations between fathers and child outcomes during middle childhood and adolescence. Much of this work has focused on parent-infant relations. The context, quality, and complexity of father-child relations *and* child development should be further developed and sensitized to the dynamics of cultural definitions of optimal child development. These relations should be particularly explored within ethnic families where father presence is rarely studied. Research on ethnic fathers is overrepresented in the father absence literature and underrepresented by research in the broader areas of father presence, father care, and father involvement.
3. More research efforts toward disentangling the culture and poverty contexts of child rearing. The single parent literature has begun this process. More studies of ethnically diverse working but poor families might enhance the existing literature base. A greater need for focused research inclusive of American-Indian and Asian-American fathers rather than assertions drawn from cross-cultural research.
4. Greater linkages between the adult-centered literature on parenting (attitudes and perceptions of the parenting experience) and care (single parents and father care), and child outcomes.
5. Greater emphasis on process and the psychological ecology of the child. There are few parenting behavior and personality characteristics of parents that have direct parallels in their children. Unique contributions of fathers to child development may have their cornerstone in the psychological ecology of the child. Our ability to detect nuances of influence and change in this area may be of significance in understanding child outcomes.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The most effective policy or program development must be built around a philosophy of promoting quality of life for children within their families. This means:

1. Concentrating more on the needs of the child and less on the structure of their households. Supporting all types of family structures will give children more options for optimal care. When policies or programs are developed that apply to families, there should be a modicum of flexibility added into the definition, such that the needs of the child are addressed first and foremost irrespective of family configuration. Programs that punish families or children for living in nontraditional family forms are rarely successful, but if they promote the needs of the child a success can be achieved (Gadsden & Smith, 1994).

2. Recognition of extended family relations and significant adults in the child's network as regards public policy and community programming.
3. Programs that aid families in sustaining the contact of nonresidential fathers. If programs can help fathers to separate their feelings of failure or shame at difficult adult relations from their positive role and influence on their child(ren), these programs may succeed in helping fathers to maintain high levels of contact with their children. In addition, programs that emphasize the complex nature of masculinity, manhood and fathering may succeed in convincing fathers, as mothers are convinced (Jarrett, 1994), that their economic relation to their child, while important, may be superseded by their substantive family role in parenting. Young fathers in particular may not understand their role in increasing the life chances of their children by their shared or supplemental parenting support to mothers irrespective of multigenerational living arrangements.

Families still require a great deal of support, via informal relations and programs to raise whole and healthy children. Father's presence matters in the process of optimal child outcomes. Fathers' unique contribution may function in one family structure to add a style or create a pathway to positive outcomes for children that is different from the pathway created in another family structure, equally capable of achieving the same end. Fathers' roles are still in flux; as increasing numbers of fathers become primary caregivers of their children, we may better determine the uniqueness of the parenting ecology they provide.

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